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HINTS TO YOUNG PAINTERS
AND THE PROCESS OF
PORTRAIT PAINTING
BY
THOMAS SULLY.



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L. W. H.



HINTS TO YOUNG PAINTERS.



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HINTS TO YOUNG PAINTERS,

AND THE

PROCESS OF PORTRAIT-PAINTING

AS PRACTICED BY THE LATE

THOMAS SULLY.

PHILADELPHIA
J. M. STODDART & CO.

1873.

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PREFACE.

THESE "Hints to Young Painters" were prepared for the press by the late THOMAS SULLY in the year 1851, and revised by him in 1871, but they were not, during his lifetime, placed in the hands of any publisher. Their merit lies in their brevity and clearness, and they are addressed especially to young artists, who will find in them much useful information. Knowing the deep interest that was felt by the profession in every word spoken or written by the venerable painter, it has been deemed best to add to the "Hints" a few notes on the preparation of canvas and vehicles, gleaned from his copious memoirs. These will interest the accomplished professor, as well as the inexperienced amateur, and may prove of service to both.

F. T. S. D.

December, 1872.

HINTS TO YOUNG PAINTERS.

PART I.

THE experience I have had in portrait-painting enables me to recommend the manner of practice by stating particulars that may instruct or interest beginners. Perhaps I shall occasionally mention trifles, but I will venture the risk of doing so in my desire to be useful.

I will first treat of the painting-room. A north light is the best. I should prefer a window that was situated in the middle of the north side of a large room.

I take it for granted that the beginner has partly fitted himself under the tuition of an able

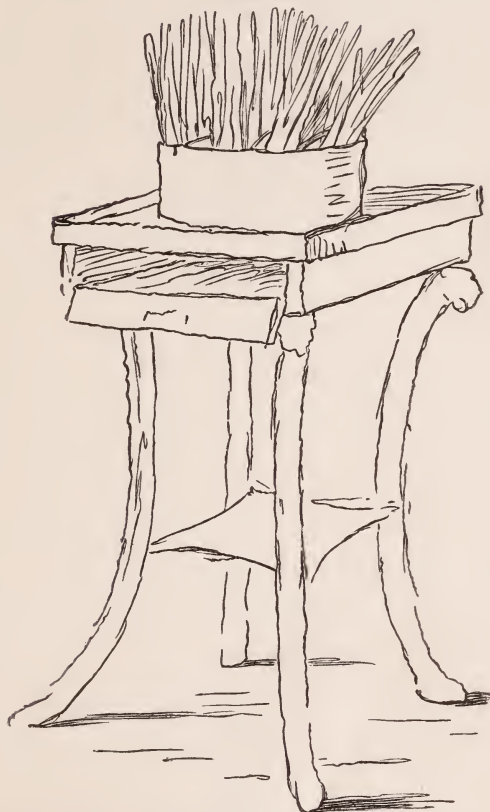
professor, and that he has acquired the power to draw from memory the human figure in any position. This being attained, painting will be easily acquired; without this power, the painter will be frequently perplexed, and liable to error. A knowledge of perspective is requisite. The ability to draw animals, particularly the dog and the horse, and some knowledge of landscape-painting, will be found of service. A knowledge of anatomy will be very useful.

The articles required by the beginner are the following: an easel (I prefer one that stands upright); a maul, or resting stick; a palette, and brushes of various sizes; sticks, or crayons of charcoal; crayons that are used by those who draw upon stone; palette knives (three will do); a foot-rule; and compasses. These articles may be had at any artists' furnishing-store.

I use a plate-glass slab, with a muller, to grind precious color on, and to set my palette for painting; I clean it with spirits of tur-

[Photographed from a pencil sketch made by Mr. Sully in his 90th year.]

Pencil Stand.



In this Stand there is a place for the Palette, and a flap to shelter it. On the top is a place for the Palette Knives, Rags and Slate Book.

Height, 2 feet 6 inches. The Table Part, 2 feet 4 inches by 1 foot 4 inches.

NOTE.—Mr. Sully used a pencil stand of the above form for many years, and highly recommended it to his artist friends. The oval box on top is divided into a number of compartments, to hold brushes of different sizes and qualities. The table top is surrounded by a ledge.

pentine. The plate glass should have white cloth glued on back, to prevent its sliding on the table; the table also should be covered with a cloth. I keep a small slate-book on the pencil-table, in which I write such memoranda as occur during each day of the week, which I register; if worth keeping, I record them in the proper books. Keep plenty of clean rags at hand, which are needed for cleaning the palette and slab; these should be cleaned every day after using them. Some of the tints and colors that are left may be put away for the following day by means of a small saucer. Place this in a deep plate and cover it with water; by this method the colors will keep a day or two. The palette should be cleaned with a rag and linseed oil. The flag, or glass slab, must be cleaned with spirits of turpentine. When I paint, I use no other liquid than a mixture of drying-oil and spirits of turpentine in equal quantities, but it should be used sparingly. Keep this mixture in a small bottle, and it will last many days.

The accompanying strip of measurements I have found useful. These measurements are intended for a bust-size canvas—30 by 25—and it will be observed that on the strip for male portraits the proportions are larger than on that for females. Should the person be tall or short, place the measurement accordingly, except the one from the top of the canvas.

Common soap is the best to wash the brushes with. Keep a jar of water, into which drop small pieces of soap. If you have not time to wash your brushes when required, put them into this mixture. If the soap has melted, the brushes may remain two or three days without injury.

When washed, rinse them in pure water and dry them with a cloth; then draw them through the mouth, to shape them to a point. If necessary, wind a thread round the brush. Finally, place them according to order in the pencil-stand.

Having detailed every preparation required for painting, we will proceed to the use thereof.

When the person calls on you to make arrangements for the intended portrait, observe the general manner, etc., so that you may determine the attitude you had best adopt. The first sitting may be short, as pencil sketches on paper, of different views of the person, will be sufficient to determine the position of the portrait.

At the next sitting make a careful drawing of the person on a gray canvas (kept for that particular purpose). It should be of a middle tint, made of white, and black mixed with white: it must not shine. This study must be made in charcoal, with its proper effect of shadow relieved with white chalk, using for the middle tint the color of the canvas. The drapery, also—if the time will allow—should be put in. I find that two hours is long enough to detain the sitter. I seldom exceed that time; and six sittings of two hours each is the time I require. When alone, begin the portrait from memory, fix the place on the canvas by means of the strips of measurement from the top of the

canvas and the other marks of distances ; if the person is tall or short, place the head accordingly. The drawing made from the person in charcoal and chalk will enable you to paint in the effect of the picture with burnt umber on a white ground (some prefer a colored ground). Paint freely, as if you were using water-colors, not too exact, but in a sketchy manner.

In this process I use a mixture of drying-oil and spirits of turpentine in equal portions, to moisten my brush as occasion requires. (In all painting I use only this mixture.) This preparation may take two days to dry. Sometimes I hasten this effect by placing my picture in the sun, sheltered from the dust, by the window, and in winter I expose the picture to the fire. I recommend the use of large brushes.

In the next sitting tints are to be used, and all inaccuracies corrected ; while, of course, the likeness is to be made as close and characteristic as possible.

The following tints I use in the next painting :



1. Yellow Ochre & White.

2. Burnt Terra d' Sienna & White. 10. Ditto d^o

3. Ultramarine (or permanent blue & white. 11. Ditto d^o

4. Burnt Terra d' Sienna.

12. Ditto with a little burnt T.d' Sienna.

5. Chinese Vermilion.

13. Burnt Terra d' Sienna & Raw UMBER.

6. Indian Red.

A. Flake White.

7. Raw UMBER.

B. Yellow Ochre.

8. Raw UMBER & White.

C. Ivory Black.

The principal colors from which these tints are made are white, yellow ochre (by the way, this color *will not keep under water*), ultramarine (or permanent blue), vermilion, Indian red, raw umber, ivory-black and burnt umber. These are sold in compressible tubes.

In the use of burnt umber in the first painting, the color in some places, being much diluted with the liquid mixture, is inclined to run. To prevent this, I place the work horizontally for an hour or two.

As I have previously mentioned, in the next sitting from the life, tints are to be used. See the "Palette" on preceding page.

Manner of proceeding with the first coloring: Cover all the forehead with the tint No. 2, and use No. 1 to increase the light on such parts as require it. The first light shadow will be Nos. 2 and 3, mixed; make the blue tint, No. 3, more pure on the temple. The white of the eye, with Nos. 2 and 3 and, perhaps, a little white. If it be a blue eye, use black and No. 3. In a delicate complexion the mixture of 2 and 3

may extend to the lower part of the face. No. 11 will increase the strength of the shadows, and No. 10 will increase it further; No. 9, ditto, particularly where the shadows are of a cool tint. Perhaps the shadows in some places will require a warmer hue; then 13 and 12 will be found useful (they have a little burnt terra sienna in the raw umber tints). Having adjusted the shadows, a little vermilion and white may be scratched on the cheek and on the lips.

The drapery and background should now be painted. These may be executed from the sketch made from the life. If it is a large picture where more of the person is seen, the drapery must be painted from an exact study made from the person. The color of the background should be either darker or lighter than the head or drapery. In the former painting the hair must be painted, the color of which must be a matter of judgment, as hair is of so many different colors that no rule can be offered. Burnt umber is an excellent color for that purpose; and Vandyke brown, for dark

shadows, is excellent, but it is a bad dryer, and I have reluctantly abandoned the use of it.

We come now to the sixth and last sitting. In painting this, the same palette of tints is used, with the addition of asphaltum and madder lake. These are glazing colors, and may be used to darken and improve the shadows of the flesh tints. The hair and drapery may be glazed with the mixture of asphaltum and madder lake. To the bottom of the burnt terra sienna add two tints, also to the blue tint and the vermilion. These tints may be employed here and there in improving the color.

The complexion is a part of the likeness. The tints which I have arranged are for a light complexion; I merely strengthen the tints, and add Indian red to the vermilion, for dark complexions.

The last operation of the painter is to varnish his picture.

Suffer the picture to dry for about four or five weeks. Should it remain without varnishing for years, it will not suffer for the want of

it; it will only look dull, and some colors will not show their effect.

A hard varnish, such as copal, is not suitable for a portrait. Mastic varnish and gum-de-mar varnish are good. I prefer mastic varnish. If it requires to be more liquid, thin it with spirits of turpentine.

When preparing to varnish, first apply raw potato to the picture, which effectually cleans it from soil of all kinds. (This is the discovery of an American painter by the name of Rand, who also invented the compressible tubes.) The raw potato must be peeled and rubbed on the painting; by dividing the potato into thin slices, the picture may be covered with the juice. This juice must be washed off with pure water, and entirely dried with a piece of chamois leather. The picture is then prepared for the varnish.

I recommend a flat varnish-brush, made of hog's bristles. In applying the varnish, move the brush from corner to corner, by which it may be laid evenly. This will dry in two or three

days; expose it for that purpose to the sun (see that the dust is not admitted); in the winter expose it to the fire for a day or two. In three or four days the varnish will become dry. For a varnishing-cup the apothecaries can supply an excellent article in the form of a saucer with a lip to it, in order to pour out a liquid, so that if any varnish is left in the saucer, it may be poured back into the bottle. Wash the brush and saucer with common soap.

Should the surface of the picture become cloudy, or, as it is called, "bloom," clean it off with a silk handkerchief; or if that will not do, a *thin* coat of turpentine and varnish will remove the blooming.

I would earnestly recommend the student of painting to read the lectures of Sir Joshua Reynolds and the works of Burnet.

A lay-figure, or manikin, will aid the painter in painting drapery. In a lay-figure there are places to strengthen the limbs by the action of a turn-screw acting on the screws connected with the figure. Moths are driven from the

figure by dipping rags in spirits of turpentine and fastening them to the figure.

I have discovered an excellent preparation to cover a discarded picture : a portion of white lead, ground in skimmed milk to the consistency of jelly, will effectually cover the surface of a discarded picture and enable the painter to make a new picture upon the same canvas. I have prepared new canvas according to the same mixture, and with entire satisfaction. After the first coat of paint is laid with this mixture, which will dry in about an hour, the pumice stone should be used to grind off the lumps of thread that may injure the level surface. The next painting it would be well to mix a little vermilion with the paste, in order to see that you have covered the canvas regularly. I have used this mixture since the year 1840. The canvas imported is liable to crack.

The late Rembrandt Peale gave me an excellent receipt to prepare canvas. Prepare, in a sauce-pan, paste in the usual way ; first subdue all the lumps of flour that may be in the mix-

ture. Place the pan on the fire, and the instant it begins to boil take it off, and pour into it a small portion of Venice turpentine that has been warming by the fire, and stir up the mixture. The proportions are about a teacupful of turpentine of Venice to a full measure of a quart of paste. This mixture should at once be applied to the canvas while it is hot. When cold, the pumice stone should be employed to level the surface; after which, the paint intended for the ground should be put on with a brush and leveled with a spatula.

THOS. SULLY.

PHILADELPHIA, June, 1871.

PART II.

MACGUILP—named after its inventor—is the vehicle most commonly used by artists to moisten the colors while painting and to assist the application of glazing. It is composed of equal proportions of mastic varnish and drying-oil, thoroughly blended together.

A good macguilp is made by dissolving bees-wax in mastic varnish or in drying-oil, in the proportion of a piece of wax the size of a hazelnut, to a spoonful of the liquid.

Another macguilp is made of water saturated with sugar of lead, an equal quantity of mastic varnish and three-fourths of the quantity of linseed oil. It dries well.

Baron Schrøder gave me the following receipt to make "painter's butter," which is much used by the German artists: Two parts (or two

ounces) of nut oil, one part (or ounce) of gum mastic in drops, and as much sugar of lead as might lie on a twenty-five-cent piece. Put the two first-named articles into a vessel of hot water (the mixture must be in a phial). The water must be kept boiling, so as to dissolve the mastic; then drop in the sugar of lead, but avoid the consequent fumes from the lead, which by this treatment parts with all its noxious qualities, retaining only its drying property. When the mixture is quite dissolved, pour it into a vessel of cold water. The mixture will keep together, and must be skimmed off the water. It is then fit for use.

Mastic varnish is thus prepared: Choose the gum mastic in drops that are transparent. It comes in the form of tears, and can be had at any apothecary's. To 35 ounces of rectified spirits of turpentine add 12 ounces of the gum, pulverized, and half an ounce of camphor gum. Expose this to the warm sun for a few days and they will mix. Or you may subject the same compound to a vessel filled with water, made

at first a little warm, which must afterward be increased to a boiling state for one or two hours. It must be stirred occasionally with a stick. Mastic varnish newly prepared is not so good nor so fit for use as that which is a year old. The gum camphor facilitates the dissolving of the ingredients of the varnish.

The desideratum for the best kind of varnish for oil paintings has for a long time been the plague of artists. Some are advocates for "egg varnish" for the covering of a newly-painted picture. I believe this to be pernicious. Some recommend copal varnish, made by the mixture of turpentine instead of alcohol, and used when made thin by added turpentine. I prefer mastic varnish to any of the foregoing; but the very best varnish I have met with is made of the gum de mar dissolved in spirits of turpentine. It preserves its gloss and transparency, is not given to mildew, is easily removed from the surface of a picture and can be applied without risk to freshly-painted work. This varnish is much used in the United States, and almost univer-

sally in Germany. But it will not, by the use of any adjunct, make macguilp.

Baron Schrøder confirms the good character I had heard of the white varnish, so generally employed in Germany. It is made of the gum de mar, according to the following method: To about as much of the gum as would fill a tablespoon add half a pint of spirits of turpentine and half a teaspoonful of calcined magnesia. This will dissolve in the sun. If too thick, the quantity of turpentine may be increased. It may be used upon a freshly-painted picture, and will dry quickly.

The varnish made from Canada balsam diluted with turpentine is bad. It grows dark and is difficult to remove.

The following precaution is recommended before varnishing a picture, and the process is also serviceable in removing the greasy surface that a picture is apt to acquire if long neglected: Peel a raw "Irish potato," cut it in slices and rub it over the face of the painting. After this, wash it entirely off

with pure water and dry it with a soft chamois skin, which is the best instrument to effect the purpose.

Mr. Scarlet (a skilled restorer of old pictures) discovered that when the first coat of varnish does not harden, it is expedient to add a second application.

In January, 1825, while on a visit to Washington, I made a copy from a picture painted by my friend, Charles King. Being obliged to send the copy to Philadelphia before it was quite dry, I covered the surface with egg varnish, to prevent the action of stickiness in the paint while the canvas was rolled up. (A picture should always be rolled with the painted side *outward*.) My experiment was quite successful. After the canvas was placed on a stretching-frame in Philadelphia, I removed the egg varnish by the application of pure water with a soft sponge, and the picture was found in good order. The varnish was made as follows: One egg (the contents of the shell except the part called the eye), lump sugar about half the size

of the egg, dissolved in the least portion of water. The canvas was 30 by 25 inches.

Egg varnish is thus prepared. In two ounces of alcohol dissolve one-eighth of an ounce of lump sugar, (a piece the size of a nutmeg,) and add the white of an egg. The sugar, reduced to a powder, mixes with the white of the egg, by beating it up into a froth with the alcohol. The varnish is applied with a soft sponge to the picture, which is placed horizontally. I have varnished a picture with this the instant it was dry, and have immediately followed with a coat of mastic varnish, which, by exposure to the sun, would become hard in two days.

In painting up a picture at once, I have used the gum-de-mar varnish with satisfaction. I found that it dried too quickly, unless I used linseed oil with it, and I could make the vehicle dry as slowly or as fast as I desired by regulating the quantity of oil I added. Still I do not consider this mixture of oil and gum-de-mar varnish a good vehicle.

Linseed oil, (which is the best to paint with,)

is rendered more pure and limpid, by dropping into the phial some grains of white lead. Cork it tightly, and place it in the sun, (fire heat will not produce the proper effect.) Shake it often.

Rembrandt Peale prepared drying-oil thus. In an eight-ounce phial put two tablespoonfuls of gold litharge, and fill up with linseed oil. Keep it exposed to the sun, or near the fire, for a few days, shaking it up frequently. Keep it corked. Finally let it settle, and decant the clear oil.

After the drying-oil has been made a month, (unless it has been frequently well shaken,) it is no longer in a fit state to use in making mac-guilp.

In order to force the colors to dry, Sir William Beechey used a mixture of nut oil, mastic varnish and sugar of lead, well shaken together and allowed to settle. He employed this only for light colors.

In using asphaltum very freely,—a color which is generally slow to dry,—I have found it to be a good expedient to drop some “severe dryer”

in the macguilp employed. Had I mixed the dryer with the paint itself, it would have soon become hard upon my palette.

Whilst on the subject of liquids used in painting, I would refer to the use of dryers, which are necessarily employed with certain colors, or these would take too long a time in becoming hard. Ivory black, Vandyke brown, lake and (if used alone) vermilion, require the aid of a dryer. Many artists have used sugar of lead prepared in various ways, but I prefer to use what is called "severe dryer." A few drops mixed in a lump of color as large as a chestnut will be found a sufficient quantity.

For the purpose of painting over a discarded picture which I wished to prepare for a new picture, I have used white, ground up in skimmed milk. I have also used it to prepare a new canvas, using, after the first coat of paint, pumice stone to reduce the lumps in the threads of the canvas. Three coats of paint are quite enough. If the "absorbent ground," which it makes, is objected to, a brushing over the sur-

face with linseed oil will make it a "resisting ground."

I have noted that the full-length portrait of my wife with her favorite dog, (dated 1841,) was painted on a canvas prepared by myself with a ground of white lead and skimmed milk, and as no change has yet (1867) shown itself, I will record my mode of preparation.

I procured Russia sheeting, and after stretching it on the frame, I gave it a coat of white lead ground in skimmed milk to the consistency of ordinary paste. I then used the pumice stone to subdue the knots or irregular places on the surface. Then I followed with a second coat of the paste, and in order to distinguish it from the first coat, I tinted it very slightly with vermilion. This preparation pleased me entirely. It is now 1867 and I have not found any fault with it.

Charles Wilson Peale prepared canvas in the following manner. Isinglass (fish-glue) pounded on a flat-iron into small pieces. Let it stand all night in water. In the morning put it on

the fire to boil; there should be as much isinglass to the water as will form a jelly, after it has boiled and been allowed to cool. The canvas must be wet and pumiced to render the surface even. The jelly should be laid on with a large spatula, (Mr. Peale had one made of wood for the purpose.) After the jelly has dried on the canvas, cover the surface with a coat of the required color; and when that coat is *nearly dry*, flatten the surface with the spatula. In this process no brush is necessary.

Washington Alston told me that his picture of "Elijah in the Wilderness fed by the Ravens," (one of his best works,) was painted with colors ground in skimmed milk. After having advanced his work as far as he could with these means, he varnished with copal, and then finished with ordinary oil colors.

Charles Leslie made free use of macguilp, even in beginning his pictures. So did Chapman.

I am persuaded that it would be a useful practice in oil painting, in order to obtain fresh-

ness and decision, to copy from pictures painted in water colors.

I have found that the following is a proportionate division of the field of the canvas, 30 by 25 inches. For the portrait of a man of ordinary stature, (say 5 feet 10 inches,) let the corner of the eye be distant from the top of the canvas $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches. For a female of average height, (say 5 feet 3 inches,) let the corner of the eye be 10 inches from the top of the canvas. This distance must be diminished or increased, as the sitter may be above or below the statures indicated.

Sir Joshua Reynolds preferred using, for the first sitting for a portrait, only white, yellow, vermilion and black in the flesh.

In speaking of likeness in portrait-painting, Wilkie once said to me that "it was well to increase the beauty of the complexion and give the appearance of youth, as this in a measure compensated for the want of life and motion."

In a portrait every part may be exactly rendered, but should be kept subordinate in regard

to the face. From long experience I know that resemblance in a portrait is essential; but no fault will be found with the artist, (at least by the sitter,) if he improve the appearance.

Sir Thomas Lawrence was accustomed to paint his common size portraits placed in a broad flat frame painted yellow, which defended the edge of the canvas, and helped him to determine how much yellow should be in the picture. Lawrence oiled out the ground when proceeding with his work. He was very exact and particular with the outline; more so than any painter with whose process I am acquainted.

Washington Allston always preferred an old picture-frame to the glaring glitter of a new one.

It seems to me that if the refinement of a portrait is carried too far, the identity of the sitter may be lost; it then ceases to be valuable as a likeness, whatever it may be as a picture.

Mr. Trott (an ingenious miniature-painter who was very intimate with Gilbert Stuart) told me

that Stuart recommended to the painter, to draw that side of the face at which the nose presents its handsomest outline. I myself have heard Stuart say that he considered the nose the most important feature in giving the likeness to a portrait. I am sorry to differ in opinion from so great a master, but my experience does not prove it to be so. I believe the mouth to be the most important feature in forming the resemblance.

When I visited Allston in 1835, he mentioned, in the course of a conversation upon art, that his method in painting was much more simple than formerly. He had in a great degree banished *process*, finding it better to use the simplest means to produce an effect of color. He disapproved of using raw umber in flesh tints, (a color much used by me.) He preferred, as a shade tint, a mixture of Indian red or vermilion, Antwerp blue or blue-black, and yellow ochre and white. He never used Prussian blue. He employed Naples yellow in flesh, also Venetian red.

After this conversation, I for some time abandoned the use of raw umber, but finally replaced it on my palette, and have found no reason to regret it.

Talking of the motion of waves, Allston remarked that the water always breaks in an angular form ;



Sir Martin Archer Shee condemned the use of yellow ochre in flesh. He considered burnt terra sienna quite yellow enough, and for a very swarthy complexion he glazed over the flesh with asphaltum, and while glazing retouched with a set of colors prepared for the purpose. Umber he discarded. Venetian red was a favorite color in flesh, also lake. For the sake of durability, he thinks that glazing should be sparingly used. He observed to me that as colors were liable to change to a yellow or brown hue, due allowance should be made for this in the first instance.

It is recommended, in imitating a dark complexion, to mix asphaltum with white, and to use, in preparing your palette, only the white thus reduced.

Benjamin West advised the use of Spanish brown mixed with white, as a flesh tint. By a sort of accident I have made use of it in one or two portraits, and have found it an excellent color. I believe it will not change.

I have had occasion to remark that sober colors, employed in a large picture, produce great richness.

In retouching flesh tints, I find it better to prepare the surface by scumbling the lights and glazing the shadows, than by oiling the surface, since oiling where the new paint has not touched it, will become yellow after a time. The practice of scumbling and glazing may often be repeated with advantage to the picture; it will give softness and depth of effect. Even the hair will be much improved in silkiness of texture by this treatment.

Allston strenuously recommended solid paint-

ing in tinting flesh, especially for a large picture to be seen at a distance. "Paint," said he, "pure, decided tints; if they are too raw, you may correct them by scumbling. Glaze at pleasure." Again he said, "Never use brown drapery to a dark or yellow complexion; it will make it look like a snuff-bag." He recommended me to use a very slight glazing or toning over every portrait I painted. Generally speaking, he thought asphaltum most fit for the purpose. Any opinion on the subject of painting from Allston, is entitled to grave consideration.

I found that beeswax was sometimes used by the English painters, prepared by boiling the honeycomb and extracting the wax with care. Next, it is bleached in the sun, in order to mix it with mastic varnish, with which it is used in painting. It should be melted by itself and the varnish poured upon it. If a small lump of this mixture is united with the white paint, all the other colors of the palette will, in painting, partake of it. No other liquid must be used while painting with this.

In April, 1822, I made a copy from Hogarth's "Gate of Calais," and painted most of the picture in colors tempered with wax; especially the figure of the Scotchman, which (except a slight effect of burnt umber in the commencement) was entirely painted with wax in the colors, prepared as follows:—To a dessert spoonful of mastic varnish add a piece of bleached wax, melted by the fire; when cold, the mixture will form a thin jelly, which may either be used as a macguilp, by tempering it with oil, or with the colors ground in oil.*

Sir William Beechey had a custom of tempering his colors with a mixture of japaner's gold-size and turpentine. He usually declined the use of any liquid in which to dip his brush, preferring to temper his color with the palette-knife. When finishing a picture, no matter how large it might be, he brushed it over with a

* Mr. Sully has left no record of the result of this method as far as the "Gate of Calais" is concerned; but he painted one other picture, (a family portrait,) in the same manner, and in fifty years (1872) the colors flake off, defying all efforts at restoration or cleaning.

mixture of spirits of turpentine and drying-oil, adding upon this the gold-size and turpentine, upon which, while they are moist, he retouched the work. The process served as a varnish. I feel persuaded the practice is bad. Benjamin West tried this process upon his picture of "Christ Healing the Sick," and the evil result of it is now visible.

Toning the picture is a general practice. Beechey always oiled the surface slightly before toning. Sometimes he used burnt sienna (very thin), oiling again as soon as it was dry, and then toning a second time with a mixture of blue, lake and brown, making an ink color. In this process the brush should be moved from corner to corner.

Trumbull condemned the practice of toning pictures, and thought a better plan to produce a desired hue in the work, was to mix with white a tint of the required tone, and while painting the picture to use no other white than this on your palette.

Correggio generally painted on a ground of

pearly tint, composed of Indian red, black and white.

Titian's grounds were usually of burnt umber and white, which is the nearest approach to the half tint of nature.

Rubens used a white ground, and his coloring, which is uncommonly rich, is like metal, compared with the truth and purity of Titian.

The English painters in the early part of this century employed absorbent grounds; and nearly all imported canvases now are absorbent.

I inspected carefully the manner pursued by Rubens in the conduct of a picture. The fairest flesh tints were, in the high lights, Naples yellow and white, going off into shadow by mixing with the neutral tint (composed of black, white and vermilion, or Indian red). The next degree of shadow is of this neutral tint and Venetian red, and the darkest shade is a mixture of burnt umber and Venetian red. Over this are broken some tints of blue and white. The olive and white in the half shadows, and the same with a burnt sienna hue. The Venetian red and white

is broken here and there over the flesh, which gives a true effect. An arm had, in the finishing, some blue and white scumbled thinly over the light, and, while wet, some touches of Venetian red and white were broken into it, as on the elbow, wrist and fingers. The next degree of darker flesh had the broad light of Venetian red and white going into shade by use of the olive tint; this, again, strengthened with Venetian red, for the half shade. The extreme dark shade in the flesh is of burnt umber and Venetian or Indian red. The first shade (the olive tint) is corrected with the neutral tint. Very dark flesh is of burnt brown ochre and white, for the broad tint; the high light of brown ochre and white. The half shade is of the olive tint, and the extreme dark, of burnt umber and Indian red.

In comparing the different works of Rubens I have seen in London and Paris, I could not detect in his method any toning over flesh.

After a strict examination of the best pictures, the benefit to be derived from them is to draw such conclusions as may in future serve for fixed

rules of practice, taking care not to be amused with trifles, but learning to regard the excellences chiefly. In every picture an artist should consider from whence that fine effect or that ill effect proceeds. Thus every picture, good or bad, may conduce to his profit.

Sometimes a painter by seeking for attitudes too much, becomes cold and insipid, or affected. This is the case with those who would have every figure in fine action; they lose sight of nature.

In general, all the shadows should be of one color, and the lights only to be distinguished by different tints; at least it should be so when the background of the picture is dark.

Benjamin West made his preparatory sketches on paper with burnt umber and a reed pen, putting in the effect also with the umber. Next, he brushed over with size, and then retouched with oil colors.

For sketches, or even for studies, in oil colors, I find it has answered well to paint with colors that have been ground in but little oil. In paint-

ing with these, dilute them with spirits of turpentine, and use the preparations as if they were water colors. Such sketches were frequently made by Wilkie. He showed me several which were in his portfolio with engravings and drawings, and they were wholly free from the stickiness that always accompanies mere oil colors.

The best panels for the painter's use are made of oak or of straight-grained mahogany. Poplar panels, when used at all, should be painted on the back and edges. Poplar is, however, a treacherous material. It is apt to warp or split. It will shrink; and if, as is sometimes the case, there is a knot in the wood, this knot will probably contain turpentine, which will penetrate any covering of paint, even though it should be an inch thick.

The evil effect of a very small knot in the panel can be overcome, it is said, by rubbing the place with garlic, before painting, but I should not like to trust to this expedient.

Grind white in spirits of turpentine, and drop in about one-fifth part of copal varnish. This

mixture was used by Shaw to load the prominent lights of his pictures, which is best done when the outline is fixed. I used it with great satisfaction in the large picture I painted of "Washington Crossing the Delaware," (now in the Boston Museum,) and in 1851 it has not failed, although painted many years ago.

Trumbull resorted to an odd expedient to protect his pictures, in the Capitol at Washington, from the dampness of the walls. He covered the back of the canvases with a thick coat of beeswax dissolved in spirits of turpentine. The solution when cold was as thick as a jelly.

At Hartford I once saw in the possession of Daniel Wardsworth, Esq., a picture painted by Trumbull when he was eighteen years of age, and it was quite fresh-looking. It had been painted with only drying-oil and turpentine, and had lasted many years unchanged.

Good tracing-paper is made by dissolving rosin in spirits of turpentine. Brush the mixture over tissue-paper, and hang it on a line

to dry. Both sides of the paper should be coated with the mixture.

Brushes, when not in use, may be protected from the ravages of the moth by dipping them slightly in olive oil.

The painter in water colors should use distilled or rain water. Rose water is safe and agreeable.

In the year 1823, being on a visit to Baltimore, Mr. Robert Gilmore lent me a letter which he had received from Sir Thomas Lawrence (dated London, 1820) on the subject of art, and accompanying two portraits which he had painted of Mr. and Mrs. Gilmore. The following is an exact copy of its contents:

“I have at length the pleasure to send you the pictures, on the finishing of which I have bestowed more time than—unless you are well acquainted with the difficulties of art in the practice of self-distrusting artists—you would readily imagine. You must forgive me if, considering these portraits to be of my best productions,

I appear a little solicitous about their fate when you receive them, and send you one or two directions to be observed on their arrival. When the case is opened, let the pictures be placed for two or three days in the open air, but, observe, the *sun* may not visit them. Let them be carefully washed with a sponge and rather warm water, and, as carefully, immediately dried.

“As the varnish might possibly be chilled on the voyage, I have sent them unvarnished, and the pictures will be the better for it. Let them be varnished with simple Mastic Varnish, in procuring which I cannot but think it advisable to have the assistance of a good chemist, instead of trusting for it to a common color-shop. The Mastic should be picked from the finest part of the gum. I should wish to be indebted to some ingenious artist for the trouble of varnishing them, for he would do it with more care and delicacy than others; I will return the service when his pictures arrive in England.

“If, before they are hung up, you wish to show them to your friends for their inspection, let them be so placed that the light may fall upon them from the *left* of the spectator, (no matter on which side it appears to come in the picture,) and forming an angle to that light. And when they are to be hung up, remember that a *light-blue*, gray or drab-colored ground is the most unfavorable for pictures.* My thus attempting to give them every advantage when they arrive at their place of destination is but the extension of that solicitude to make my works as nearly perfect as my defective ability permits, which I may with truth say, has never left me for the last fifteen years of my professional life.

“The art may be pursued creditably with little of present effort on the knowledge required by easy practice; but its highest enjoyment is lost, and its future recompense a dream, unless it tasks the full exertion of the faculties. It is,

* Lawrence preferred a crimson or strawberry-colored wall for his pictures.

perhaps more than any other pursuit, that figurative stream on which no one can remain stationary with suspended oar. Inculcate this truth, my dear sir, to any young man whose merit may deserve and whose circumstances may need your patronage. (To experienced artists I do not presume to speak, for I know I but use their language.) Tell him that *one* concentrated effort toward successful completion is worth a hundred sketches, and, above all, that in the correction of his defects, he must be content to see with the eyes of others, (so that his selection of advisers be good,) and even to do *violence* to his *own* perceptions, since it was originally from their error that the fault existed. Believe me that the most valuable present you can make to a young man of real merit, is the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds; I mean his Discourses and his Journal to the Low Countries. These, which are in no part infested with idle, fanciful theories, will elevate his notions to the true philosophy of art, even in its inferior department, and emancipate his mind

from the thralldom of those narrow conceptions with which the infancy of art has so long to struggle.

‘For he who servilely creeps after sense,
Is safe, but ne’er arrives at excellence.’

“These are the lines of one of our Poets, and they apply as forcibly to the painters’ art.

“I feel a grateful interest in the progress of painting in America; I hope I have a desire for it everywhere. But I am deeply sensible to obligation, and from America I have received an unsolicited professional distinction which has been rendered more valuable to me by the commissions which accompanied it, and the hands through which it was conveyed. I wish that the few efforts of my pencil that I send to it would better convey my sense of the high honor it has done me, and better justify its kindness; but if any practical attention to my advice may aid the authority of great names, and make the opinions of Reynolds the standard of criticism and taste in the better circles among

you, the defects of my pencil will be atoned,
and my obligation be half repaid.

“Very sincerely, etc., etc.,

“T. LAWRENCE.”

* By the kindness of Mr. Gilmore, Mr. Sully was permitted to copy one of these pictures, Mr. G.'s portrait. It was copied as closely as possible, touch for touch, and is now in the possession of the artist's heirs. The original is pronounced by competent judges to be one of Lawrence's noblest works.



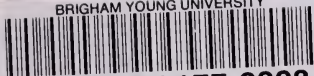








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